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## The Role of Public Policies and Community-Based Organizations in the Developmental Consequences of Parent Undocumented Status

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### Abstract

**P**olicy debates about undocumented immigration in the United States focus most often on adults and adolescents. Yet 5.5 million U.S. children currently reside with at least one undocumented immigrant parent, with 4.5 million of these children U.S.-born citizens. Given that children with undocumented parents constitute nearly one-third of all children with immigrant parents and about 8 percent of all U.S. children, their well-being holds important implications for U.S. society. This review summarizes the current evidence on whether and how parent undocumented status affects the cognitive, school attainment, and mental health outcomes of children and youth. Research on mechanisms through which these effects occur—including both removal and fear of removal; parent-child separation; lower access to public programs; psychological distress; “awakening” to one’s own undocumented status; and work conditions and economic hardship—is also reviewed. Potential moderators include the chronicity of experienced undocumented status; large-scale economic changes such as the Great Recession; and neighborhood and network social capital. Both public policies and community-based organizations’ practices may help reduce the developmental risks for children with undocumented parents. We conclude by discussing a range of such policies and practices, related to preschool and prekindergarten, work and employment, border enforcement, program enrollment and access, organizational and institutional partnerships, and a range of choices regarding a pathway to citizenship.

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## From the Editors

Hot button issues appear to dominate public discourse today. Few are more controversial than policies affecting undocumented immigrants. Yet, discussions about immigration reform often leave the children behind. In this *Social Policy Report*, Hirokazu Yoshikawa, Jenya Khlopseva and Carola Suárez-Orozco tackle the issues head on. The authors examine the direct and sometime indirect effect of undocumented status on children's development. Fear of removal or separation from parents, less access to public educational programs, psychological stress, and economic hardship all emerge as issues affecting children of undocumented parents. Drawing from the developmental and social policy literatures, Yoshikawa and colleagues describe potential deleterious effects and moderators of the effects, such as the chronicity of documentation status, the impact of the "Great Recession," and access to social networks within neighborhoods. Also, they offer insight into the effects of policies that govern undocumented status, enforcement practices, service enrollment practices based on means-testing, workplace practices, universal prekindergarten, and other early child care and education programs. The authors conclude with policy recommendations for comprehensive immigration reform and its impact on child development. Three leaders in the field, Ruby Takanashi, Frank Bean, and Alexander Ortega, comment on issues and policies related to undocumented status and child development.

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# The Role of Public Policies and Community-Based Organizations in the Developmental Consequences of Parent Undocumented Status

**C**oncerns about undocumented<sup>1</sup> migration to the United States became a national preoccupation in the first decade of the 21st century as this form of migration reached historically high rates in the 1990s and 2000s. Immigration reform has been debated repeatedly in the last decade, with little in the form of actual legislation resulting. In 2012, in the absence of passage of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which would have provided a pathway to citizenship to youth and young adults who arrived as children, the Obama Administration passed the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Memorandum. This memorandum provided a 2-year temporary reprieve for those under the age of 31 who met certain requirements. However, as of this writing, neither the DREAM Act nor more comprehensive immigration reform (integrating a pathway to citizenship, employment verification, and border strengthening) have been passed as federal law.

Although flows have decreased substantially in the past several years, the total undocumented population of 11.5 million in the United States continues to be near its historic high (Hoefer, Rytina, & Baker, 2012). In 2011, roughly 6.8 million or 59 percent of the total estimated undocumented population are immigrants from Mexico. The next leading countries of origin are El Salvador (660,000 or 6%), Guatemala (520,000 or 5%), Honduras (380,000 or 3%), and China (280,000 or 2%; Hoefer, Rytina, & Baker, 2012).

Policy debates about undocumented immigrants have until very recently focused almost entirely on undocumented adults and youth, rather than considering children of undocumented parents. In 2010, it was estimated that nearly one third of all children with im-

migrant parents have at least one undocumented parent (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Roughly 80 percent of these 5.5 million children are citizens themselves. Among those under the age of 6, fully 91 percent are citizen children (Passel & Cohn, 2009; Passel & Cohn, 2011). Notably, relatively few young children accompany adults who cross borders outside the law (Passel, 2005). The vast majority of U.S. citizen children with an undocumented parent were born in the U.S., with a recent study showing that the majority of births (over 60%) occurred 5 or more years after migration (Passel & Cohn, 2011).

The experience of growing up with an undocumented parent is thus most likely to occur in the context of a mixed-status family, with the child a U.S. citizen and at least one parent undocumented. However, in many families the children or youth are also undocumented. In this report, we consider how parent undocumented status affects children's development, across the periods of early childhood, adolescence, and the transition to adulthood.

## Does Parent Undocumented Status Affect Child and Youth Development?

Until the last few years, there were virtually no studies of the effects on children's development of having an undocumented parent. This is due in part to the difficulty of researching this status directly. Relatively few large-scale studies obtain information about parents' citizenship status, let alone undocumented status. Some of the studies reviewed here use direct measures of undocumented status; others use proxies.

Before launching into a review of the developmental consequences of growing up with an undocumented parent, we must acknowledge that this characteristic is correlated quite strongly with indicators of socio-economic disadvantage. When compared to authorized

<sup>1</sup>We use the term "undocumented" to denote not having legal documents or any formal status leading to a pathway to citizenship. The term "unauthorized" is also often used for this group (Bean & Stevens, 2003).

immigrants, undocumented individuals often have lower levels of education (Passel & Cohn, 2009). In this review we focus on studies in which traditional indicators of socioeconomic status (SES) like education, income and employment are statistically controlled when examining the effects on children of parental undocumented status.

The research to date suggests that parent undocumented status is associated with lower levels of children's cognitive development and educational progress, across early childhood to early adulthood. The evidence regarding less than optimal socio-emotional development emerges in adolescence. In early childhood, as early as ages 2 and 3, a proxy for parent undocumented status was associated with lower levels of standardized cognitive skills, though not with indicators of socio-emotional development (Yoshikawa, 2011). In middle childhood, legal vulnerability linked to parental undocumented status or self-reported undocumented status itself predicted lower levels of general positive development as perceived by parents (Brabeck & Xu, 2010; Ortega et al., 2009).

By adolescence, studies have distinguished the effects of having an undocumented parent vs. being undocumented oneself. Being undocumented is associated with lower academic expectations and a variety of barriers to educational attainment and college attendance (Gonzales, 2011; Perreira & Spees, 2013). Controlling for own undocumented status, having an undocumented parent has been associated with higher levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms among youth (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010). Finally, a large-scale study of Mexican-origin young adults showed that having an undocumented mother, relative to an authorized one, was associated with between 1.25 and 1.5 fewer years of schooling, depending on the method used to adjust for characteristics of socioeconomic status and other family background variables (Bean, Leach, Brown, Bachmeier, & Hipp, 2011; Leach, Bean, Brown, & Van Hook, 2011).

## Mechanisms of the Influence of Parent Undocumented Status on Children

Researchers have proposed a variety of mechanisms to explain how parent undocumented status might lower children and youths' learning and subsequent schooling outcomes. Developmental models have been put forward by Gonzales (2011), Yoshikawa and Kalil (2011) and Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, and Suárez-Orozco (2011). We review qualitative as well as quantitative evidence regarding potential mechanisms.

## Removal Proceedings or Experiences

The most pervasive and damaging family event associated with parent undocumented status is removal of a parent from the United States. In the years 2010 and 2011, the Obama Administration substantially increased the pace of removal of the undocumented from the U.S. (to near 400,000 in each of the two years; Simanski & Sapp, 2012). Between July 2010 and September 2012, over 22 percent of all removals were parents with citizen children (Wessler, 2012). Over 46,000 parents with at least one U.S.-born child were removed in the first half of 2011 alone (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2012c). Research on the effects of arrest for removal, based on the large workplace raids of the mid-2000's, suggest subsequent increases in children's behavior problems, anxiety and depressive symptoms (Chaudry et al., 2010). These outcomes for children may be due to several factors. First, the loss (or potential loss) of the parental attachment figure along with changes in daily routines is likely to be highly distressing to the child. Second, the economic well-being of the household is drastically affected, with loss of income of the detained or removed parent and what income can buy for child and family functioning. Third, fear of authorities can be greatly heightened in these families, with remaining relatives sometimes keeping children at home and out of school during the removal proceedings. Fourth, the remaining relatives typically experience high psychological distress, which can in turn harm children's well-being as well as learning.

Fear of parental removal can affect children regardless of whether the parent is actually arrested. Qualitative studies suggest that fear of removal can be transmitted to children either directly or through more general parental stress, with consequences for child well-being (Brabeck, Lykes, & Hershberg, 2011). Children of Mexican immigrant parents in one study expressed a variety of fears, including fears of the family being split up, of both parents leaving the U.S. while the children stay behind, or generalized fear of the police (Dreby, 2012a). Children also expressed feelings of stigmatization and discomfort with others knowing that their parent(s) were immigrants. Some children in Dreby's sample conflated immigrant status with illegality, potentially exacerbating patterns of lower parent involvement with school.

## **Parent-Child Separation**

Mixed-status families are more likely than other immigrant families to engage in transnational practices in which parents and children travel and live separately (Suárez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2011). Children in mixed-status families are likely to experience periods of protracted parent-child separation for a variety of reasons. During the initial migration, asylum-seeking parents, for example, often leave their children behind with caretakers with the intent of sending for them as soon as they are able to regularize their status; this often takes much longer to arrange (often much of a childhood) than anticipated. Citizen children can travel back and forth across borders easily while unauthorized parents can cross to the country of origin but not back into the U.S. without undergoing arduous and expensive crossings. Lastly, citizen children may be separated from their parents under circumstances of deportation. Parent-child separation can harm children's learning and emotional development due to disruption in attachment, interruptions in schooling, and economic losses in the household (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011; Suárez-Orozco & Hernandez, 2012). One transnational study supports this pattern, from the perspective of sending countries. Lahaie and colleagues compared children in households in sending areas of Mexico whose caregivers leave for the U.S. to those whose caregivers do not leave, based on a sample of families in areas with high emigration rates. Mexican children with "left behind" status showed lower levels of academic and behavioral outcomes than those whose caregivers stayed with them (Lahaie, Hayes, Piper, & Heymann, 2009).

## **Lower Access to Means-tested Public Programs that Benefit Children's Development**

Undocumented parents are ineligible for most services provided to adults or parents by the federal government. This includes sources of health or mental health care such as Medicaid or Medicare, aside from emergency care and care provided during the perinatal and immediate postnatal period; publicly funded job training; public

housing; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP, or Food Stamps); the Earned Income Tax Credit; Social Security; and cash welfare assistance. The undocumented are also ineligible for the expanded health insurance coverage through exchanges provided by the Affordable Care Act. However, U.S. citizen children of undocumented parents are eligible for many of the means-tested benefits that are offered by the federal government. For example, the Children's Health Insurance Program, SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and child care subsidies are all available to U.S. citizen children, and undocumented parents can enroll their children in these programs.

Research suggests, however, that undocumented parents face barriers to enrolling their eligible children in these programs, for two principal reasons. First, these parents may simply not have the information about these programs. Particularly for the most recent wave of undocumented migrants, who are often the first in their families to emigrate, sources of information about public programs in the U.S. may be scarce, above and beyond the language barriers associated with lower access. This may be because the social networks of recently arrived undocumented adults may have high concentrations of other individuals who are also undocumented (Yoshikawa, 2011). Second, undocumented parents may be unwilling to enroll their U.S.-born children in these programs in order to avoid being placed on the "radar screen" of authorities, organizations, and government-

associated programs. These parents may perceive that accessing government programs for eligible children risks becoming identified as undocumented and being deported (Capps & Fortuny, 2006). This may especially be true when proof of income is required. Yoshikawa's (2011) study of low-income immigrant parents in New York suggested that children of undocumented parents were less likely to receive childcare subsidies and the center-based care that such subsidies can purchase. Lack of access had developmental consequences for the children in that study in that center-based childcare is consistently associated with better cognitive skills in the first years of life, among children from low-income families. The pattern of lower center-care access occurred even when

**Parent-child separation can harm children's learning and emotional development due to disruption in attachment, interruptions in schooling, and economic losses in the household ...**

restricting the analysis to those families who had chosen center-based care for their children—among that group, undocumented status was still associated with substantially lower levels of child care subsidy receipt. This may be because childcare subsidy receipt requires some proof of income—with undocumented parents reluctant to identify their employers, and employers in turn reluctant to identify them as employees.

### **Work Conditions**

Several studies indicate that undocumented low-wage workers experience substantially poorer work conditions than authorized low-wage workers (Bernhardt et al., 2009; Yoshikawa, 2011). Much higher rates of working below the minimum wage, in particular, were experienced by undocumented low-wage workers compared to their authorized counterparts in both studies (e.g., rates between 30 and 40 percent, depending on the age of the child and the gender of the parent). In addition, the undocumented workers' jobs were characterized by much lower access to sick days, vacation days, overtime pay, and employer-provided health benefits (Yoshikawa, 2011). Finally, the job duties of undocumented parents, relative to authorized ones, involved fewer opportunities for autonomy, as well as higher levels of repetition and physical demands. Within the low-wage service economy occupied by the working poor in the United States, the undocumented hold jobs at the very lowest levels of skills and organizational hierarchy.

In addition to these poor work conditions measured at single points in time, the undocumented have dramatically lower rates of wage growth. Wage growth among low-wage working parents can benefit children's academic and behavioral development by increasing parents' expectations for their children's school success and achievement (Yoshikawa, Weisner, & Lowe, 2006). Wage growth was near zero, even in the context of the booming economy of the mid-2000's, for undocumented parents in the New York study (Yoshikawa, 2011).

### **Psychological Distress and Economic Hardship**

Parents' psychological distress and hardship are consistently associated with lower levels of child cognitive development as well as emotional well-being, throughout early childhood and adolescence (Gershoff, Aber, Raver, & Lennon, 2007; Yoshikawa, Aber, & Beardslee, 2012). These factors help explain the association of undocumented status of parents with lower child cognitive

development in one study (Yoshikawa, 2011). Undocumented status, especially in harsh state or local policy environments, may constitute a source of toxic stress response in caregivers, if the threat of removal is experienced on a regular and chronic basis (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2005). However, no studies to date have examined the biological processes (e.g., HPA axis or immune-system processes) associated with undocumented status that could constitute toxic stress responses with long-term consequences for children's health, learning and behavior.

By middle childhood, as many children in mixed-status families become aware of parents' undocumented status, psychological distress and anxiety become part of children's own experience. Some children have expressed worries about parental deportation as early as primary school years. A public example of this stress occurred when a daughter of an undocumented mother expressed her worries to the First Ladies of the U.S. and Mexico upon their visit to her Maryland classroom (Mackey, 2010).

### **Awareness of Own Undocumented Status and Its Consequences**

For children of undocumented parents who are undocumented themselves, an additional mechanism of effects appears in adolescence. This is the awakening to one's own undocumented status, or what Gonzales (2011) has termed "learning to be illegal." In his large qualitative study of undocumented youth, he found that most experienced the early years of K-12 schooling as a protected time, and looked back on it as having "de facto" legal status. This is due to U.S. policy regarding student access to public education, which is universal without regard to child citizenship status (cf. the Plyler vs. Doe Supreme Court decision, 457 U.S. 202, 1982). By late adolescence, as peers engaged in normative teenager activities such as driving, working, or planning for college, undocumented youth gradually realized the scope of their blocked opportunities. Difficulties in college access (e.g., access to in-state tuition, and Tuition Assistance Programs, or TAP); access to drivers' licenses; and employment all represented blocks to economic and educational progress and the normative transition through late adolescence (Abrego, 2006; Gonzales, 2011; Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011).

As a result of awakening to these powerful barriers, many youth in Gonzales's study reported becoming much more guarded, or restricting their social lives, due to dis-

comfort revealing their own status to their peers. Experiences of the transition to college were bifurcated—some had access to family resources and/or guidance counselors who helped with the navigation of the limited but specific scholarships and resources available to undocumented students to attend college. Others had fewer resources, and were much more likely to drop out of high school or enter the world of undocumented or “illegal” work (e.g., obtained through fake Social Security numbers). Some showed their stress in the form of psychosomatic symptoms.

## Potential Moderators of the Influence of Parent Undocumented Status

The consequences for children of parents’ undocumented status may be mitigated or exacerbated by historical, policy, or neighborhood and network contexts. Such factors include the chronicity of undocumented status, the effects of the “Great Recession,” and neighborhood and network issues.

### Chronicity of Undocumented Status

Immigrant groups in the U.S. differ in their likelihood of long-term undocumented status. This is determined most powerfully by policy. Between 1986 and 1988, roughly 70% of the nation’s undocumented left that status (typically for legal permanent resident status), due to the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA; Motomura, 2007, 2010). The pre- vs. post-IRCA divide has created a new generation of parents and their children who since the early 1990’s have had increasingly restricted pathways to citizenship. A large number have now kept this status, without any opportunities to embark on such a pathway, for decades (Motomura, 2007, 2010). Under current law, a U.S.-born child of an undocumented parent can sponsor parents for citizenship once he or she turns 21. The parent must then return to the country of origin and apply from there for legal permanent resident status. Until very recently, and following 1996 legislation, those who had accrued “unlawful presence” time in the U.S. were also subject to additional bars of up to 10 years prior to re-entry to the U.S. (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013). Of course by that point, the large part of the child’s development, and any influences that the parents’ undocumented status may have had on it, is over. The chronically undocumented may be at greater risk of detrimental effects on their children’s learning, development and attainment than those who enter a pathway towards citizenship or those who are legal permanent residents (LPRs;

Bean et al., 2011). Those who have met the criteria for Deferred Action may be mitigated for that 2-year period from these harmful effects. In fact, those who have applied and been accepted for Deferred Action report an enormous sense of relief and concrete progress in their educational and career pathways. Some, however, also experience tension regarding members of their family (e.g., older siblings; parents) who are ineligible (Gonzales & Terriquez, 2013).

### The Great Recession and Other Economic Downturns

The Great Recession may have exacerbated some aspects of the experience of undocumented parents in ways that have further increased developmental risk to children. National data show that the number of Hispanic families living below poverty has gone up during the Great Recession (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2012). Although rates of employment are relatively higher for Hispanic and immigrant workers than non-Hispanic and native-born, wages dropped for Hispanic and immigrant workers after the Great Recession (Kochhar, Espinoza, & Hinze-Pifer, 2010). Thus, although employment itself has recovered for immigrant workers, rates of poverty and low wages, both of which can harm children’s long-term school and life prospects (Kalil, 2013), have not. In addition, economic downturns may increase episodes of discrimination against low-income immigrants, particularly those perceived as undocumented. Such discrimination experienced by immigrant parents can have harmful effects on children, even those too young to fully understand what it means (Halim, Yoshikawa, & Amodio, 2013). Finally, returns of undocumented immigrants to home countries have increased during the years of the Great Recession—these have likely brought about parent-child separations in the case of children “left behind” in the U.S. The effects of these returns on affected children are unknown.

### Neighborhood and Network Social Capital

The influence of parents’ undocumented status on children may differ depending on the neighborhood and network-level resources to which a household has access. Some neighborhood features may act to exacerbate risk; others may mitigate it. For example, living in a community where family members or friends’ parents have been detained or deported is likely to heighten insecurity while corroding a sense of social safety and belonging (Menjívar, 2006). On the other hand, in longer-standing

ethnic enclave communities, or those with richer social service infrastructure, information about eligibility of U.S.-born children for public programs or benefits may be richer (Dreby, 2012b). Opportunities for bridging capital, such as network contacts with authorized or citizen parents, can provide valuable information about childrearing and community and policy resources (Yoshikawa, 2011). Multi-generational networks are less likely for those parents who were first in their families to migrate during this great wave of undocumented migration of the 1990's and 2000's—and therefore older generations with experience raising children are less available to this group.

## Policies and Community-Based Programs That Take into Account the Life Chances of Children of the Undocumented

Can programs and policies mitigate the risk that parent undocumented status represents for children's health, learning, education and behavior? At a point in history in which the U.S. population would barely grow without immigration, risks to millions of U.S.-born citizen children, as well as over a million children who are undocumented themselves, should not be taken lightly. Our economy will benefit from maximizing the developmental potential among all of its children, including the 5.5 million who have an undocumented parent. The research just reviewed suggests risks to these children's learning, school success, and attainment, in particular, stemming from parent undocumented status. Policy makers and community-based organizations have taken several approaches to reducing or mitigating these risks to the next generation. Some policies can target undocumented status itself; others can target the process of review in removal proceedings; and yet others could target the mechanisms that link parent undocumented status to decrements in children's development.

### Policies Directly Modifying Undocumented Status

The most fundamental policy modifying undocumented status itself would be the institution of a pathway to citizenship for undocumented parents. This continues sporadically to be the subject of debate at the federal level, as it was in Congress under the Presidency of George W. Bush. A variety of criteria for eligibility have been considered, including minimum number of years of residence; years of continuous employment; and lack of a criminal background. Many proposals have included the payment of a fine and ensure that the undocumented are at the

"back of the line" (meaning not ahead of those who have been in waiting for legal permanent residency or citizenship under other circumstances). Recent proposals have for example put forward a 13-year path to citizenship, including 10 years during which the U.S. southern border would be further enforced.

For undocumented youth, a pathway to citizenship has been proposed multiple times in Congress through the DREAM Act (first proposed in the Senate in 2001; Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, 2001). The 2009 version of the proposed Act would grant qualifying people—those under 35 years old who arrived in the U.S. before age 16, have lived in the U.S. for at least 5 years, and have received a high school or equivalency diploma—a "conditional" status during a six-year period. This bill requires this group to (a) graduate from a two-year community college or (b) complete at least 2 years towards a four-year degree or (c) serve two years in the U.S. military. After this six-year period, those who meet at least one of these three conditions would be eligible to apply for permanent resident status (Miranda, 2010).

However, there are concerns regarding the DREAM Act's benefits when the population of the undocumented who are parents is considered. Thirty-eight percent of women and 21% of men who are under 35 years old and have a high school degree, and thus are eligible for the DREAM Act, are parents (Batalova & McHugh, 2010). Some scholars argue that parental responsibilities often hinder individuals' obtainment of a higher level of education (Lopez, 2009). Thus, parents who immediately qualify for this Act might not be able to complete the requirements that lead to a permanent legal status as they would be faced with the task of completing at least 2 years of postsecondary education while also attending to family responsibilities.

Additionally, there are over 279,000 undocumented parents who meet the DREAM Act's age requirements, but do not have a high school diploma or a Certificate of High School Equivalency (commonly known as a GED certificate; Batalova & McHugh, 2010). Even though they might be stimulated by the prospect of obtaining a legal status to receive secondary education, family demands might make it particularly challenging for this group to do so. This would prevent this group of parents from even obtaining a conditional status. This group may require adult education slots and focused outreach to ensure that they are ready for the requirements (or any potential pathway to citizenship that similarly requires involvement in education). Finally, the DREAM Act excludes people who

are older than 35 years of age; thus, a group of undocumented parents who are older than this age limit would not even have a chance to apply. Thus, the benefits of the DREAM Act are likely to be limited for the undocumented population who are parents.

A ray of hope for many undocumented youth emerged with the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Memorandum issued by the Obama Administration in 2012, which provided temporary protection from removal for certain people under the age of 31 who came to the United States as minors (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2012b). These individuals

must have continuously resided in the United States for the last 5 years, be physically present in the United States at the time of making their request for consideration of deferred action with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, have entered the U.S. without inspection or have had their lawful immigration status be expired as of June 2012, be currently in school, or have graduated from high school, or have obtained a GED certificate, or be a discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the United States, and have no criminal records. The memorandum also provides for work authorization and a Social Security number, which facilitate obtaining identification such as drivers' licenses. Notably, Deferred Action applies to undocumented youth and young adults only.

From the perspective of undocumented parents, however, DACA's requirements can pose barriers (New York Immigration Coalition, 2012). First, the age limit of 31 excludes many parents. Second, undocumented adults do not have access in most states to many of the education programs of which participation is required (e.g., GED programs and publicly funded job training programs). In fact, analysis of the first year of DACA applicants showed that parents were under-represented in this group (Batalova, Hooker, Capps, Bacheir, & Cox, 2013). It appeared that many parents did not know that they might potentially be eligible. Many others without high school degrees

were not participating in formal education programs. As a response, New York City became the first city in the nation to pass legislation setting aside \$18 million of additional adult education slots for those adults who are potentially DACA-eligible (Quinn, 2013).

The research reviewed in this article points to the serious risks to children's learning and subsequent school progress and socio-emotional development that stem from having an undocumented parent, above and beyond the poverty and other socioeconomic risks correlated with undocumented status. A pathway to citizenship would reduce the reluctance of these parents to enroll

their U.S. citizen children in programs for which they are eligible; bring these parents out of the shadows to access public and community supports; and reduce the stresses about removal experienced by both parents and children.

Intermediate policies that have been proposed at the state level include temporary worker status to support and ensure a steady supply of workers for particular low-wage job sectors (Utah) and the right to become a lawyer in the state (California). Temporary-worker visa policies are also being considered as part of federal comprehensive immigration reform, as of this writing. This approach has a relatively long history in American policy towards the undocumented, including the bracero program of the mid-20th century, which applied to Mexican-origin workers (Ngai, 2004). Such policies are targeted to industries and sectors in need at particular points in time—thus the temporary status only provided to laborers. Such policies do not consider the variation in employment statuses and hours that is partly driven by parenthood and the age of children in a family (i.e., those parents who choose different job sectors, or who choose different work hours or nonwork due to the demands of very young children, might not be eligible for temporary worker status). These labor force-directed and temporary modifications of undocumented status, from the standpoint of the second generation, may result in continued

**The research reviewed in this article points to the serious risks to children's learning and subsequent school progress and socio-emotional development that stem from having an undocumented parent, above and beyond the poverty and other socioeconomic risks correlated with undocumented status.**

mixed status for families with two undocumented parents and U.S.-born children.

Modifications to already existing immigration laws that affect undocumented parents can also be proposed. For example, under current law, individuals who crossed the U.S. border without papers can be granted a waiver of inadmissibility and issued a visa on the basis of proving extreme hardship to their relative. However, the definition of a relative extends only to spouses and parents of the petitioner and does not include hardship imposed on the petitioner's children (Immigration and Nationality Act, 2006). Thus, if an undocumented parent cannot claim extreme hardship to his spouse or parent, he cannot be granted a waiver that enables him to adjust his status. One of the ways to ensure that more parents who crossed the U.S. border without inspection are granted legal status is to extend criteria for hardship to petitioners' children (not limited to hardship for a spouse who has to take care of a child).

### Policies Modifying Enforcement Practices

The developmental and policy rationales for considering parents of U.S.-born children as a subgroup in enforcement activities is simple: two generations are severely affected by removal. The research just reviewed suggests that removing a working parent imposes a double penalty of lost earnings of that parent to support his or her child's development as well as harm to the long-term prospects and productivity of that parent's children. Over 46,000 parents of U.S.-born citizen children had been removed in the first 6 months of 2011 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2012e).

States in recent years have taken steps to encourage the likelihood that undocumented immigrants, including parents, will be identified. Among the most well-known are those in Arizona and Alabama. In Arizona, SB 1070, the "Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act," was approved by the Arizona Legislature and signed into law by Governor Brewer in April of 2010. SB 1070 included provisions adding state penalties for not carrying papers, and for harboring and transporting illegal immigrants. Arizona state law also allowed for local law enforcement to stop individuals simply for suspicion of being undocumented. In the Supreme Court case *Arizona v. United States*, the Supreme Court reversed the harshest aspects of the Arizona law. Alabama's HB56 required immigrant parents to register the citizenship status of their children when enrolling them in public schools. The Eleventh Circuit court blocked implementation of this and other aspects of the Alabama law,

interpreting the Supreme Court as limiting state authority to control immigration.

Based in part on state actions against the undocumented, and in the absence of Congressional legislation, advocacy organizations and federal policy makers began to act on this issue. An Obama Administration memo issued in the fall of 2011 outlined guidance for prosecutorial discretion to consider family and community ties during immigration enforcement activities (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2011). Family ties might include, for example, having a U.S. citizen child. However, by mid-2012 it was made public (again after pressure by advocates for the release of this information) that virtually no parents had been released from removal proceedings due to this provision (Yoshikawa & Suárez-Orozco, 2012).

In addition, members of Congress have proposed legislation to take into account children's needs in situations of removal proceedings (the Humane Enforcement and Legal Protections for Separated Children Act in the House, 2011; and the Help Separated Families Act in the House, 2012). In December 2012 the Obama Administration issued a new policy governing federal requests to local law enforcement to detain those arrested for removal, such that only those with more serious crimes (e.g., convicted or charged with a felony; those with multiple misdemeanor convictions) would be subject to detainer requests (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2012a). This rule may reduce the probability of parents without serious offenses on their records being separated from children and other family members while awaiting the outcome of their case.

### Programs, CBO Practices and Policies Targeting Enrollment Access for Means-tested Benefits

Some undocumented parents may be reluctant under current conditions to enroll their children in programs for which these children are eligible. Access to means-tested programs could be facilitated through outreach and applications that facilitate enrollment (Crosnoe et al., 2012; Yoshikawa, Weiland, Ulvestad et al., 2013). Some state Medicaid, TANF, or SNAP agencies, for example, have instituted clear instructions to low-income immigrant parents that their child may be eligible. In those cases a reduced set of information will be requested from parents about their own economic and household circumstances (Crosnoe et al., 2012).

Community-based organizations (CBOs) can play an important role in easing enrollment barriers for children

in mixed-status families. Data from a recent study of immigrant access to Health and Human Services programs in three states show several strategies that successful CBOs have used to ensure access of mixed-status families to benefits. First, CBOs, not being identified with the federal government or local law enforcement authorities, are more trusted settings. Organizations that develop expertise and close relationships with low-income immigrant groups, particularly those with high proportions of undocumented status, can access these often otherwise inaccessible networks. Some also work with groups of informal organizations (e.g., churches; other faith-based organizations) to provide information about programs that can benefit children's development such as public prekindergarten, child care subsidies, Food Stamps, or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, & Children (WIC).

Second, CBO's can facilitate bringing undocumented immigrant parents out of the shadows. For example, one challenge common to mixed-status families is lacking access to widely recognized identification, including one critical form of identification: the driver's license. Some cities, such as New Haven, Trenton, San Francisco, and most recently Los Angeles, allow municipal identification associated with that locality to help increase access to resources (Semple, 2010). Florida, Nevada, and Connecticut as of this writing allow drivers' licenses among DACA recipients, and California allows them for all undocumented adults.

In New York, parents must show photo identification (ID) in order to visit their child's school. For years, this ID was a driver's license. Responding to advocacy action, New York City allowed consular identification and foreign passports to serve as additional acceptable forms of photo ID. The New York Immigration Coalition subsequently worked, together with the New York City Council and the mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, to bring together public schools in high-concentration immigrant neighborhoods with consulates of countries that have been the sources of large migration flows to New York. ID drives sponsored by the Mexican consulate at these schools have resulted in tens of thousands of immigrant

parents obtaining these consular IDs. More recently, these drives have included information and assistance concerning DACA applications (Starr, 2013). Identification drives and other consular strategies can help mixed-status families acquire forms of identification that then can be used to facilitate enrollment in DACA or other programs. Similar consulate drives have been successful in other cities, such as Boston (Montero-Sieburth 2007).

Third, CBO's can address the barriers faced by undocumented parents who feel reluctant to provide proof of income to demonstrate eligibility for programs. For example, a CBO in Maryland works with immigrant laborers and provides proof of income letters for day laborers who lack stable employment. The organization vouches for the number of days a worker has secured employment and how much he or she makes. Such letters help workers apply for benefits that are contingent on work, such as SNAP, TANF, or child care subsidies (Yoshikawa, Weiland, Ulvestad et al., 2013).

Finally, CBO's and advocacy organizations can partner with government agencies to facilitate information sharing about low-income immigrant populations, including mixed-status families. In Massachusetts, for example, CBO and advocacy leaders meet monthly with both the Department of Transitional Assistance (which administers SNAP and TANF) and the state Medicaid office. Both groups report benefits, with the state agency administrators hearing about the barriers faced by immigrant groups and the advocates and CBO leaders hearing about changes in regulations and policies from the federal and state levels. Policy implementation strategies that ease barriers for mixed-status families have emerged from these discussions (Yoshikawa, Weiland, Ulvestad et al., 2013).

### **Universal Prekindergarten and Other Early Childhood Care and Education Programs**

As pointed out by several scholars (Gonzales, 2011; Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, et al., 2011), public schooling is a "protected" period during the development of children who are undocumented. Public prekindergarten is an important and expanding part of many public school

**Community-based organizations (CBOs) can play an important role in easing enrollment barriers for children in mixed-status families.**

systems, with 40 states implementing them as of 2010 and roughly 27% of the nation's four-year-olds enrolled (Barnett et al., 2010). These programs have robust effects, ranging from small to moderate, on children's language and pre-literacy skills, the very dimension that appears to be most at risk in studies of the young children of undocumented parents (Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005; Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013; Wong, Cook, Barnett, & Jung, 2008; Yoshikawa, Weiland, Brooks-Gunn et al., 2013).

However, many public prekindergarten programs, unlike the K-12 portions of the school systems of which they are typically a part, are means-tested (only 8 are not). They require the kind of paperwork that undocumented parents may feel reluctant to complete (e.g., proof of income requirements that are more characteristic of federal means-tested benefits than public schooling). Prekindergarten programs that are not means-tested, such as the ones that have shown strong positive effects on children's cognitive skills in Tulsa and Boston, may reduce such barriers for this population. In addition, research suggests the benefits of a more socioeconomically diverse preschool population, when compared to one that is restricted to the poor, for children's learning and development (Henry & Rickman, 2007; Mashburn, Justice, Downer, & Pianta, 2009).

Prior to the typical age for public prekindergarten, efforts to ease enrollment in center-based care would facilitate cognitive development among children of the undocumented. Efforts targeting the paperwork process, including those implemented by CBOs mentioned previously, could help in this regard. In addition, parenting and child development programs provided in trusted settings such as primary care clinics (e.g., during well-child visits) have improved the cognitive development of infants and toddlers of low-income immigrant parents. The Video Interaction Project by Mendelsohn et al. (2007) is an example of just such a program. Home visiting programs with standardized curricula and qualified, skilled visitors also show promise in improving children's developmental outcomes in low-income families (National Forum on Early Childhood Policies and Programs, 2007; Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004). However, to the extent that home visiting programs require the proof of income that some undocumented parents feel reluctant to report, there may be access barriers. Primary-care-based enrollment, particularly when information is obtained around the child's birth, has been more successful for means-tested program enrollment of U.S.-born infants of undocumented parents. For example, children may be enrolled in WIC at the hospital at the time of their birth (Yoshikawa, 2011).

## Workplace Policies

As noted previously, undocumented parents experience dramatically worse job conditions than their authorized low-wage counterparts. Recent reductions in labor standard inspections have only exacerbated these patterns (Bernhardt et al., 2009). The undocumented are concentrated in particular job sectors with poor work conditions (e.g., agriculture, food processing, nanny, or housecleaning work), and within these low-wage sectors, they have the lowest positions. Rates of pay below the minimum wage and lack of access to workplace benefits could be addressed through reform of labor laws. This could occur by either revising strategies for enforcement of current federal labor laws or supplementing them at the state level. Another approach to improving workplace conditions is unionization. Recent examples exist of successful efforts to unionize occupations with high proportions of undocumented workers, such as janitors in Los Angeles (Milkman, 2006) or home-based child care providers (Grindal & Yoshikawa, 2013).

Comprehensive immigration reform would bring the employment of the undocumented out of the shadows. With a legal status that is recognized in workplaces for employment, undocumented workers may be less afraid to report job conditions that are illegal themselves. In one study, undocumented workers reported such fears at relatively high rates (Burnham & Theodore, 2012).

## Concluding Note: Comprehensive Immigration Reform and Children's Development

In this review we have summarized the increasing evidence suggesting that parent undocumented status harms children's development, across early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, and the transition to adulthood. Immigration policy rarely considers the perspective of the 5.5 million children of undocumented parents—a significant portion of our largest growing child population. We have reviewed some of the most promising approaches to improving these children's developmental and life prospects. They encompass policies and programs that target undocumented status directly; risks associated with removal proceedings and removal itself; the early childhood learning opportunities to which these children have lower access; and the workplace conditions that harm these household's economic well-being.

Current choices in federal immigration policy include most fundamentally the choice between more

comprehensive vs. more piecemeal or partial approaches. Several comprehensive approaches are under consideration as of this writing. They include:

- a policy that addresses all segments of the undocumented population, not just the young or college-ready;
- a lengthy 13-year window before access to a green card becomes available, contingent on increased border security;
- a national employment verification system in tandem with a workplace and worker legalization process;
- a pathway to citizenship, rather than solely temporary-worker status or temporary reprieve from removal;
- temporary-worker visa policies targeted to particular industries such as construction;
- reform of visa policies for highly-skilled workers (Preston, 2013).

The data summarized in this paper suggests that certain aspects of the comprehensive approach are better from the standpoint of the development of children of the undocumented. Reform that extends beyond the restricted populations eligible for DACA or the DREAM Act would provide a path out of the shadows to parents older than the age limits of these provisions and for those most at risk, who lack engagement in formal education. Increases in adult and postsecondary education for parents, a group that is under-represented among DACA applicants, would both benefit their children's learning and school success and help provide a temporary reprieve from deportation for them (Magnuson, 2007; Quinn, 2013). A full worker legalization process, rather than simply expanding the E-Verify system, would ensure that workplace conditions are improved rather than driving some employers and employees further into the informal, off-the-books economy (Rosenblum, 2011). Improved wages and workplace conditions, in turn, improve both parent economic and psychological well-being as well as children's development.

Finally, the length of the pathway to full citizenship has implications for the development of the over 5 million children whom immigration reform may affect. This is because those with provisional status (even legal permanent residents) often express fears of consequences of use of resources that may benefit citizen children, such as preschool education (Yoshikawa, 2011). The longer a path to citizenship for parents, the greater the proportion of a child's life that would be affected by this status. For example, current proposals do not allow green-card access until at least 13 years after passage of federal legislation. This represents most of the full span of early childhood to adolescence. It is thus important to consider what different lengths of the pathway to citizenship mean for children of different ages, including citizen children, not just undocumented adolescents, adults or parents.

The developmental consequences of parent citizenship are societal in their importance because nearly a third of children of immigrants currently live with at least one undocumented parent. This status predicts the future health, productivity and

success of the nation. As a population of over 5.5 million, constituting nearly a third of children of immigrants, children of the undocumented are worthy of consideration in current immigration policy discussions as well as in the everyday practice of all who work with immigrant families in America. ■

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## Commentary

# All Our Children?

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**Y**oshikawa, Kholoptseva and Suárez-Orozco provide a comprehensive review of research and policy consequences of growing up in a mixed-status family in which at least one parent is undocumented. Their report contributes a valuable public service because the research area itself remains under the shadow of uncertain outcomes of immigration policy in the U.S. Congress. The authors make a strong case that, given the numbers of children involved and the fact that they represent about a quarter of the American child population, their well-being matters for the future of the United States. This case, unfortunately, has little historical precedent in influencing public policies.

Cross-national research (Parsons & Smeeding, 2006) points to the impact of national immigration policy on children and youth, taking into account selective factors involved in migration of individuals from the same country of origin. How a country decides to support immigrant children and youth matters. Education, health, and workplace policies can influence life trajectories. These findings and those cited in this *Social Policy Report* point to policies that can inform continuing debates nationally and at the state level.

State policies also matter in the lives of all children (O'Hare, Mather, & Dupuis, 2012), and they are likely to affect children of undocumented

parents as well. While immigrant families are now more widely dispersed in the U.S., they are nonetheless, still concentrated in geo-areas, due to work opportunities and internal migration beyond the point of entry. Thus, state policies toward children of undocumented parents, especially in access to health care and early education, are related to their outcomes. States like New Jersey and Oklahoma, with established universal prekindergarten programs, have high rates of participation from immigrant families, and their children benefit from quality early learning programs. States with maternal health policies to serve immigrants have better outcomes for newborns and their mothers (Kaushal & Kaestner, 2007). For future policy-informing research, cross-national studies of immigration integration policies on children and youth should be enhanced. Within the U.S., however, comparative state analyses provide a way to examine natural variation in state policies toward children living in undocumented families.

For the short-term, this SPR points to the desirability of universal access to health care and to early education programs versus those that are means tested. The report also focuses on the role of community-based organizations in creating and sustaining social capital in neighborhoods. Despite evidence that social capital is important for economic mobility and child well-being, these organizations are under severe strain due to the combi-

nation of growing needs and declining public investments. As children grow older, the role of public education remains crucial. Although all children, regardless of parent immigration status, have rights to education after a certain age, all indicators are that children living in immigrant families are not faring well, except in certain school districts with a strong record of educating children from low-income families including immigrants. The continuing understanding of how those outcomes are achieved is a worthy subject for research with clear policy implications.

Large-scale global migration and its consequences are part of 21st century life ([www.migrationpolicy.org](http://www.migrationpolicy.org)). As researchers seek to understand this phenomena, they should be informed by the rich literature available from global writers which seeks to capture these experiences in their complexity.

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# The Plight of the Children of Unauthorized Mexican Parents

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**N**ot all children of unauthorized parents are Mexican, but most are. And because of their parents' lack of legal status and extremely low levels of education, such Mexican-origin children, including those born in the United States, are at great risk of incurring harm, all through no fault of their own. And not through any fault of their parents either, who are usually in the United States only because the country finds itself with a lot of less-skilled work that needs doing but no one to do it. Professors Yoshikawa, Kholoptseva, and Suárez-Orozco brilliantly and thoroughly review the results from a rapidly growing body of research on the myriad ways such children are emotionally, cognitively and educationally damaged by their parents having to "live in the shadows" in a country that still does not recognize how essential their arduous labors are to its well-being.

How big is the problem? The most recent estimates indicate about 6.5 million unauthorized Mexicans living in the United States in 2011. Their children, some born in Mexico but most in this country, number

about 3.85 million. In terms of sheer numbers, the scope of the challenge to integration is considerable. Moreover, these numbers may undercount the Mexican unauthorized population somewhat due to "coverage error" of the Mexican-born in official government surveys.

What can be done about it? Yoshikawa and his collaborators rightly suggest that legalization is the best way to fix this looming travesty. At present, unauthorized migrants have few pathways to legalization and a long wait (up to 5 years) for a pathway to become available. Without immigration reform, a greater proportion of the unauthorized population will remain unauthorized longer than their predecessors who came during the 1960s and 1970s. If the United States does not provide pathways to legalization, or if it institutes difficult or punitive pathways (i.e., those that include long wait times, large fines for having been unauthorized, sizeable fees for legalizing, or prohibitively high thresholds in general that discourage applications), then the size of the group will continue to grow given the relatively small number of natives available to do less-skilled work. This would mean that the educational

disadvantages and inequalities plaguing Mexican immigrants and their families will persist.

It is thus important to include provisions in immigration reform that allow for inexpensive and fast legalization. It is also important to provide for more legal less-skilled migration and then seek to forestall illegal entries through other means than border enforcement, including employment verification systems and bilateral emigration-control mechanisms. Given current low levels of U.S. population growth, it now takes about 100,000 new jobs a month to keep up with population growth, a level that has been exceeded for over two years although the economy is widely viewed as still not back to full strength.

If the volume of legal less-skilled immigration allowed in any final policy-reform compromise is small, two consequences are possible: (1) The resulting insufficiency of visas for legal workers will contribute to severe labor shortages that will require the U.S. economy to adjust sharply, causing unforeseen hardships and disruptions (e.g., farmer bankruptcies and restaurant closings) or (2) Substantial unauthorized migration will continue,

resulting in even larger informal and underground economies (thus making for even more widespread employer exploitation of workers) and even more children in harm's way. If the latter, Yoshikawa and his colleagues' research, and my own, shows that

when immigrants cannot legalize, their families' chances of joining the middle class are sharply diminished and their own healthy development compromised. Legislation that allows for legalization and new low-skilled legal immigrant workers would not

only boost the integration prospects of today's workers and their children, it would also be good for the economy and for the country.

## Commentary

# Children in the U.S. with Undocumented Parents Research and Policy Issues

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**I**mmigration to the United States, especially from Latin America, has increased considerably over the past three decades. According to a 2013 Pew Research report, approximately 40 million immigrants live in the U.S., and of them, 11.1 million are undocumented; the undocumented make up an estimated 3.7% of the country's population and 5.2% of its labor force. Moreover, the number of children born to at least one undocumented parent, in 2009, was 350,000 and made up 8% of all U.S. births (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Yoshikawa, Kholoptseva and Suárez-Orozco provide a timely article on the potential developmental effects of having an undocumented parent and how policies and programs might serve to alleviate family and child

burden. Because of the problems in identifying undocumented individuals for large representative observations and because of the myriad of potential field and institutional barriers to interviewing individuals who are undocumented, there are few large-scale empirical studies. Most observations of undocumented individuals and families come from qualitative assessments using purposeful or convenience samples usually obtained from clinics or programs, thereby limiting generalizability and scientific inquiry. Furthermore, most of our understanding about immigration stress and child development comes from samples that are unable to differentiate families by documentation status, thereby inhibiting our understanding of the unique risk factors affecting undocumented parents and their children.

Using a proxy measure of parent documentation status, Ortega et al. (2009) found, in secondary data analyses of the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), that Mexican children with at least one undocumented parent had higher odds of parent-reported developmental risk compared with non-Latino white children, after controlling for household income, parent education, and household language. More specifically, when compared with whites, Mexican children with at least one undocumented parent had higher odds for parent-reported developmental problems than Mexican children with no undocumented parents or whose parents were otherwise citizens. Typical of secondary data analyses, however, the CHIS data were limited and not able to deter-

mine the effects of policies, family stressors, or access to public programs on the estimates.

Because there is little observational research on undocumented parents and how their contextual factors and stressors affect the health and development of their progeny, there are no well-informed frameworks to describe mechanisms to guide research and policy decision-making. To that end, the article by Yoshikawa et al. makes headway in tethering the academic literature with current policy dilemmas to develop a framework. Identified domains include fear of removal, access to public programs and subsidies, parental working conditions, economic hardship, child self-identify, and family acculturation/enculturation. Research is needed, however, to determine the magnitude of the effects of these domains on child development, the extent of their generalizability, whether they are unique or more robust for youth with undocumented parents, and what are the policies and factors that are mutable to assuage any negative impact on development.

Increasing access to educational programs, subsidies, and opportunities for youth with undocumented parents are obvious targets, although they are faced with considerable local and national political resistance, which confounds their mutability. Recently, Lopez and Fry (2013) reported that, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, college enrollment rates for

Latinos have increased, and, in fact, Latinos have a higher share of recent high school graduates enrolled in college than non-Latino whites. And the Latino high school dropout rate, while still high at 15%, is considerably lower than the 32% rate found in 2000. All signs show that the Latino dropout rate is continuing to decrease. This, of course, is excellent news! These findings are likely attributable to the significantly growing number of Latino students in the U.S. Many of these students represent first-generation immigrant families, who migrated to the U.S. for better educational and employment opportunities. It is essential that policymakers, educators, families, communities and other stakeholders ensure that this trend does not reverse in future more acculturated generations of immigrant families. It is also important that all Latino children benefit from this wave of progression, including and especially the more marginalized youth who are either undocumented themselves or have undocumented parents. The authors aptly describe how comprehensive public policies should be designed so that all immigrant youth, not just those eligible for the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) memorandum, should be able to succeed and have opportunities for achievement after graduation. This will only benefit families, communities and our society.

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